

ACTS 24 – Paul’s Third Defense: To Governor Felix

Before we get into the lesson, I was asked a question in class last time about the origin of the names Pharisees and Sadducees.

“Pharisees” is derived from Ancient Greek *Pharisaios* meaning "set apart or separated." They promoted the idea of priestly purity for all Jews. They believed in providence or fate. They believed in the concept of the resurrection of the dead. They taught that besides the commandments (the written law we have in our Old Testament), the oral law, which made up the majority of the law, was also passed down by Moses.

“Sadducees” comes from Greek *Saddoukaios* and from Hebrew *šəḏōqī* basically meaning “descendant of Zadok.” Who was Zadok? Well, if you were a good Jew, you would know exactly who Zadok was. Second Samuel 8:17 tells us that he was the high priest during King David’s reign. They did NOT believe in the resurrection of the dead. They believed in no afterlife, no spirit realm, no angels. They were the priests in the temple.

Then there was a third group that we do not talk about when we do Bible study because they are not mentioned in the Bible. But Josephus, the Jewish historian identifies the Essenes as one of the three major Jewish sects. So, let’s talk about them...

“Essenes” is derived from Greek and Latin word combinations meaning "the modest," "humble," or "pious ones." They had removed themselves from the mainstream society into their own communities mostly out into the desert. They had an apocalyptic view about punishment for sins. They believed in the coming Messiah. They believed God’s judgment was coming. They made a great contribution to our world today. Perhaps you have heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were discovered from 1946 to 1956 in about 20 caves in the Dead Sea area. Most experts believe the Essenes were the ones that penned these and kept them in storage in these caves. They believed the world was coming to an end and they wanted the scriptures to be preserved.

This answer is probably a bit more than was asked for. I hope it helps. And now we will get into the lesson in Acts Chapter 24.

We left off last time where Paul was escorted under heavy Roman guard. There were hundreds of soldiers. John MacArthur thinks it was over 200 Roman soldiers. We do not know for sure, but there were a lot of men that escorted Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Why did they feel the need to escort Paul out of Jerusalem, to get him out of town? There was a conspiracy to kill Paul and they had to "get him out of Dodge," so to speak.

Now, five days later, Paul's accusers arrive in Caesarea with their attorney, Tertullus. They prepare to present their case against Paul before Governor Felix. So, let's get into the scripture.

READ Acts 24:1

The Jewish leaders have employed this lawyer named Tertullus. He is familiar with Roman law and will present their case in the most flattering of terms. He understands the Roman "legal-ESE." Tertullus knows just the kind of things Roman judges like to hear. I want you to notice his opening words, as Tertullus stands up before Governor Felix.

READ Acts 24:2-4

Tertullus butters up Felix with flattery. He makes Felix out to be this great peacemaker and this lover of the Jewish nation. Now, if you know your history, you know Felix was not that at all. He was known for his cruelty and treachery. He was not a good guy! But since when do lawyers care about the truth? They just want to win their cases. So, he is buttering up the judge. After "kissing up" to Felix, Tertullus finally gets around to presenting the Jew's case against Paul.

READ Acts 24:5-6

He makes three accusations and here they are...

Accusation #1 – Paul "stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world." Was it true that Paul had been the one stirring up the dissension

among the Jews? No. Go back and read the book of Acts. Time and time again Luke records that the Jews were the ones who initiated the attacks against Paul. Such was with the case pending against him in Jerusalem. It had been the Jews who had stirred up a mob against Paul while he was minding his own business in the temple and helping some of his brothers to fulfill their Nazarite vows. He was not doing anything wrong.

Accusation #2 – Paul “is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” Tertullus scornfully refers to the Christian community of converted Jews there in Jerusalem, which would have included the other apostles like Peter, James and John, as a sect of the Nazarenes. That word that he uses for sect here is the same word that we derive our word “heresy” from. So, that is what he is getting at – they are a bunch of heretics! Any talk about heresy against Judaism, no matter how false it was (and this is obviously a false claim), would have been of no interest at all to Felix or the Roman government. As far as they see it, that is an internal Jewish matter. It does not affect the Roman government at all.

Accusation #3 – Paul “tried to profane the temple.” Again, this is a false charge. There is no doubt Paul was in the temple area, but he did nothing illegal or immoral.

Then comes what I call the BIG lie at the end of v 6... “And we would have judged him according to our law.” We would have handled it ourselves had it not been for that big bully named Lysias...

READ Acts 24:7-8

Their version of what happened in the temple is that Lysias came and took Paul away from them. Once again Tertullus attempts to revise history. The truth is that the mob instigated by the Jews was out for Paul’s blood. They were not interested in justice. The Romans suddenly see this disturbance taking place in the temple courtyard and they respond. Lysius the Roman commander intervenes. He goes into the temple grounds that day to rescue Paul. Do you remember this story? But, according to Tertullus, Lysius was the one using violence. “We were innocent.” He

conveniently fails to mention the part about the 40-plus Jews that conspired to kill Paul. So much for justice! Isn't it amazing how people can remember things completely differently from the way they actually happened? People can twist the truth so that they come out looking totally innocent. How many untruths does the Jewish lawyer Tertullus present on behalf of the Jewish leaders here? I went through and counted five...

1. Paul was NOT the one stirring up dissension among the Jews;
2. Paul was NOT the leader of the Christian Jews;
3. Paul did NOT desecrate the temple;
4. Lysius did NOT initiate violence against the Jews; and
5. The Jews were NOT interested in justice for Paul.

READ Acts 24:9

The Jewish leaders stand behind their man Tertullus. They promote all his lies and propaganda. The Jewish leaders are in full agreement with all the false words spoken by their advocate Tertullus.

Well, Governor Felix now turns to Paul who is ready to make his third defense in twelve days. Who were his other two defenses before? The first one was to the Jewish crowd on the steps of the Antonian Fortress. The second one was in front of the Sanhedrin. So, he stands ready to make his defense.

READ Acts 24:10-13

Paul states that he is completely innocent of all the charges that have been brought against him. He points out that not one shred of evidence against him has been produced. Nothing said about him is true. "Let me tell you about me," Paul declares. And he proceeds to make a bold declaration of his faith and what he believes in the next verses.

READ Acts 24:14-16

Paul confesses his absolute faith in divine revelation. Notice what he says: "believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets." That was their Bible at the time. The New Testament had not

been written yet. So, Paul believes all that. He takes a firm stand on the Word of God. He also says, "I believe in the resurrection, not just of the righteous, but also the wicked." Paul knows that one day all men, good and evil, small and great, Jew and Gentile, all nations, all people will stand before a holy God. They will stand before a higher court than the one Paul stands before here in Caesarea. "For this reason," Paul says, "I live my life so as to have a clear conscience before God and men." Paul tries to keep both God's law and man's law. He will obey man's law as long as it does not conflict with God's law. He is a good citizen. He does everything he possibly can to keep another brother from stumbling. What Paul is saying in essence is this: "There is no way, based on what I believe and how I have lived my life, that I could have possibly done the things I am being accused of doing. That goes against everything that I believe and everything that I am."

Paul makes a statement – this could be an application for us – about how we Christians are to live our lives. Paul's litmus test is this: Does what I am doing benefit others spiritually? Paul says, "That is the way I have lived my life. It does!" Does it point people to Jesus? Look at Paul's life. It certainly did. He was constantly pointing people to Jesus. Do my actions violate God's law or man's law? Paul is saying here, "No." These are the questions that help us to navigate life's tough decisions. We can learn lessons from how Paul lived his life. Everything we Christians do should be above reproach.

But Paul is not finished just yet. He explains to Felix what he was doing in the temple in Jerusalem when the original incident took place 12 days before. This is what was happening...

READ Acts 24:17-18a

Paul says that he had gone to Jerusalem to bring money and relief to his fellow Jews. There is poverty in Jerusalem at this time. So, the churches that Paul had ministered to on his last missionary journey had donated money and he took it to Jerusalem. This is a little detail we did not

know before. Paul is saying that part of the reason he was there was to present this money. Paul says that he was also in Jerusalem to present offerings. Remember, even though Paul is a Christian, he still practices some of the Jewish customs. It is part of who he is. It was how he was raised, part of his heritage. So, what was he doing in the temple when they found him? He was helping these brothers, these four men, fellow Christians who came from a Jewish background, to complete their Nazarite vows. Paul paid a lot of their expenses out of his own pocket and he did this at the urging of the Jerusalem Christian leaders.

Paul continues (this is when the trouble had started).

READ Acts 18b-19

Noticeably absent from these proceedings are the ones who stirred up the trouble to begin with in the temple. Where are they? Shouldn't they be here? "If they have a bone to pick against me, this is the right forum to do it in. Shouldn't they be here to present their case?" That is Paul's point. It is a good point. Not only are his accusers missing from this forum (to make their case against Paul), but also missing are the people that should be there in Paul's defense. Where are the four guys that Paul had in the temple that day that could vouch for him? Where are the Jerusalem church leaders that had sent Paul into harm's way to begin with. They are missing too. Paul is standing there alone. There are no accusers who were there that could say, "This is what he did..." And there is nobody standing in his defense either. He is alone! In my opinion, the fact that those Jerusalem church leaders are not there speaks volumes about them. They should have been there.

Paul looks over at the high priest Ananias who is standing there with the Jewish leaders. These are the same ones Paul had addressed a week earlier in the Sanhedrin and he says this...

READ Acts 24:20-21

There has been no evidence presented that Paul had done anything wrong – nothing that violates Roman law. In other words, this case should

be thrown out! With all the statements having been made, Governor Felix now renders his decision regarding Paul.

READ Acts 24:22-23

In legal terms we call this "deferring" a decision. Felix simply puts it off indefinitely. The excuse he makes is that Lysius, the Roman commander is not present. Well, Felix knows the facts because Lysius wrote that letter to him and laid it all out for him. He does not need Lysius there. It is just his excuse to put it off. If Lysius's testimony had been critical to this case, Felix would have made sure he was there. Felix basically takes the easy way out. He should have dismissed the case. But he is trying to pacify the Jews, so he does not do that. He just puts off his decision.

Some people might say, "Well, at least Felix treated Paul well while he was imprisoned at Caesarea." And while that may be true, the right thing to do would have been to release Paul. There had been no hard evidence presented by any of Paul's accusers that he had violated any Roman civil law. The fact that Paul is not acquitted immediately speaks volumes of the kind of man Felix is. He is a spineless politician. Like I said before, he is NOT a good guy.

The statement v 22 that Luke makes about Felix is interesting. He says that he had "a rather accurate knowledge of the Way." That means that Felix knows what Christianity is all about. He has an intellectual understanding of basic Christian teachings. In fact, as we read through the remaining verses here in this chapter, we see that Felix frequently invites Paul to tell him and his wife more about the Christian faith.

READ Acts 24:24-25

Sometime later after the hearing, Felix and his wife enter into discussion with Paul about Christianity. The result is that Felix begins to come under conviction about the things Paul is sharing with him. He is troubled by what he hears. Whenever you get under conviction your heart gets troubled, concerned and anxious. This is what is happening with Felix.

So, Felix tells Paul, "Go away for a while. I will call you back when I am ready for you to tell me some more."

READ Acts 24:26-27

Do you see what Felix's real motivation is for keeping Paul in custody? It is not really to learn about Christianity. He is trying to extort money from Paul! In Felix's mind Paul comes from money. Felix does not keep Paul imprisoned so that he can learn more about what faith in Christ is all about. Felix does not care about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come.

I want to give you a quote from John Phillips in his commentary on Acts. He provides some insight into Felix and Drusilla and their character:

"Drusilla, though young (still in her teens), already had a somewhat colorful and stained history. She was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I, the Herod who murdered the apostle James and would have murdered Peter [had not God intervened]. It was probably from Drusilla that Felix obtained his own information about Christianity. When Drusilla was still a small girl, her father betrothed her to marry the crown prince of Commagene in Asia Minor. The betrothal was eventually broken off because the groom-to-be was unwilling to be circumcised and become a Jew. Her brother, Agrippa II then married Drusilla off to a petty prince in Syria. When she was only sixteen, she ran away from her husband in order to marry Felix, becoming his third wife."

So, an interesting couple! Does Felix really care about Christianity? Unfortunately, I do not believe that to be the case. He has only a minor curiosity, mostly because of his wife. V 26 states that Felix's motive is to extort money from Paul. He perceives that either Paul came from money or that he has Christian friends who are well-connected financially. He hopes that Paul will offer him money in exchange for his freedom. In case you are shocked by that, back in these days this was a common practice by government officials. Corruption in politics is nothing new. It goes way

back. It has been around probably as long as there has been human government.

In the two years that Paul remains a prisoner of Rome in the palace at Caesarea, Paul does not pay Felix a dime. Paul views Felix and Drusilla as two people who need Jesus. He concentrates his efforts on their salvation. He speaks to Felix about Christ whenever he can. And Felix is eager to hear what Paul has to say. So, they have this dialogue going on. But as far as we know (this is the sad part), he never makes a decision to follow Christ. Felix is too preoccupied with temporal things. He misses the one thing that really matters. As it turns out, his window of opportunity will be two years and then he will be replaced and moved away. Then, after that, only God knows what happens. We do not know. The scriptures are silent about Felix after this and there is nothing extra-biblical that tells us whether he came to faith in Christ or not. Probably not. And that is what is sad about this whole thing.

So, here is what I came away with as far as applications:

- Here we have Felix who hears the Gospel but does not respond to it. So, lessons from Felix: NOT receiving Christ as Lord and Savior when one hears the Gospel is the same thing as rejecting Him. Having an intellectual knowledge of and being open-minded to the Gospel are not enough. "By grace are you saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). God's grace, His free gift of salvation, is offered for a limited time only. It requires a response of faith on our part. In other words, it has an expiration date.

- When is the right time to be saved? Right now. Second Corinthians 6:2 says, "Indeed, the 'right time' is now. Today is the day of salvation." Do not put off for tomorrow what should be done today!

- Like Paul we need to live with “a clear conscience toward both God and man.” This requires that we regularly take a long hard look at our own moral complexion in the sunlight and mirror of God’s Word. That is something we need to do on a regular basis. One of the reasons we have Bible study is to get into God’s word and see what it has to say about us.
- Even if we live an upright life, one that is above reproach (like Paul did), we can expect people to lie and talk bad about us in order to discredit us. They might even hate us. However, we ought not be discouraged by that because the same thing happened to Jesus and Paul. We are in good company.